DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 542 CS 217 430

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Broughton, Merry G. |
| TITLE | Poetry Covers It All! Integrating Poetry in All Curriculum Areas. |
| PUB DATE | 1998-09-00 |
| NOTE | 71p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | For full text: http://www.ceap.wcu.edu/Broughton/Poetryunit.html. |
| PUB TYPE | Creative Works (030) -- Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC03 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Class Activities; *Creative Writing; Elementary Secondary Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; Learning Activities; *Poetry |
| IDENTIFIERS | Poetic Forms |

ABSTRACT

This collection of ideas for poetry is intended to provide teachers with tips for ways in which poetry could be integrated into the daily classroom curriculum. Noting that talking about poetry is an important step in helping students see poetry as a viable outlet for their voices, the collection states that poetry should also offer students connections to their real lives. It recommends including classical as well as contemporary poetry for students' reading enjoyment. The collection is divided into the following sections: (1) "A Prayer for Children" by Ina Hughes; (2) Forward; (3) Intentions; (4) Beginning; (5) Poetry Ideas (contains 44 ideas); (6) Reading Poetry Aloud; (7) Assessment and Evaluation; and (8) Concluding Thoughts. (NKA)

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# POETRY COVERS IT ALL !!!!!

## Integrating Poetry In All Curriculum Areas

**Ideas and Poems Collected by Merry G. Broughton**

**September 1998**

**Live On-Line February 1999**

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M. G. Broughton

CS 217 430

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## FORWARD

Poetry, at least for me, is a window to my inner self. Poetry allows me to speak freely about who I am and how I view the world. Poetry is seeing and hearing and feeling and knowing and understanding and sharing. Sometimes a short poem says more to the soul than does a novel.

Because I view poetry in this way, I like to have little pieces of it lying around where I can consult them from time to time. I use poetry to calm my nerves and to set my soul on fire for a particular project. For me it is a concise way of thinking about the world I live in and about the effect that I, only one person, have on the world. It answers for me the question, "What will I leave behind?"

Teachers need to have all kinds of poetry available for students to look at and think about. As with prose, not all poetry is happy; some poetry deals with things that scare us all; for example, death. Some poems rhyme and others do not. Some poets do not capitalize at all; some use punctuation and white space in what appear to be very strange ways. Some poets like to laugh at the world and at themselves, and others use their poetry to reflect the ills of society.

Students need to see this variety. For the most part, in the early grades children tend to think that all poetry is sing-song and that every line rhymes. Students need to come to see that there are many different ways in which to write a poem and many ways to present it. It is curious to me the ways in which various poets use white space in the poems, for example. Students need to know that poetry is a viable method of expression that has many colors to it.

Poetry should also offer students connections to their real lives. Classical as well as contemporary poetry should be included for their reading enjoyment. Poetry should become something that students feel they can do. I hope that students will learn to see poetry as a possibility, just as they themselves are endless possibilities.

The value of this unit (that isn't really a unit) lies in what it offers to students. If through using the ideas in this compendium only one student achieves success, I will have accomplished my goal.

## INTENTIONS

The intent of this collection of ideas for poetry is to provide teachers with ideas of ways in which poetry could be integrated into the daily classroom curriculum. With a little ingenuity and creative planning, poetry can become an integral part of each day's studies.

Some of the ideas are meant to help students think about words -- how they are used, different ways to put them together to make connections, how the same word can mean different things in different contexts, and so on. Other ideas are meant to help students think of writing responses and to value poetry as possibility for both an oral and a written response.

A few ideas are meant for fun only -- to be read aloud just for the pure enjoyment of hearing poetry read aloud. In many cases, the teacher's use of poetry in the classroom as a thing to be dissected has only served to teach students that poetry simply isn't any fun -- it is boring and something only to be endured at school.

If some of the ideas seem to border on "busy work," it is because the ideas are meant to help students be successful and to see that poetry is not only for the elite. The ideas are meant to be concrete ways in which to present poetry so that all students may achieve success.

## BEGINNINGS

Talking about poetry is an important step in helping students see poetry as a viable outlet for their voices. Talking about poetry also helps students experience poetry in concrete ways.

Following is a short list of suggestions for a teacher-facilitator to help students begin to see poetry as an exciting choice:

1. Choral Reading - place 4-6 poems on each table in the classroom; have students walk around the tables and choose a poem, then remain at the table where they found the poem they liked; have students work together to select one poem from among the ones at their table that they would like to perform a choral reading for; students should be instructed to decide how to read the poem chorally based on the dictates of the poem (should it be soft, loud, male voices, female voices, etc.); let each table do a choral reading; have students switch tables and repeat the process
2. Visualizing - gather students in your reading corner and ask them to close their eyes; then read 3-4 poems that create a vivid picture for you as they are read; after each poem ask the students what they saw in their minds as they heard the poems read; after students have shared their mind pictures ask them to draw or paint what they saw; post drawings/paintings on a classroom wall or bulletin board along with the poems they represent
3. The Feel of Poetry - ask students to choose a poem that they think really connects with their lives, that makes them "feel something;" talk with students about how poetry comes from things that are deeply felt; ask them to think about things that are important to them; in either small or large group sessions, ask students to discuss the feelings generated by the poems they chose and share those feelings; in their reading notebooks, ask students to respond to the idea that poetry can be "felt" and how the things that are important to them affect the writing of their own poetry

## READING POETRY ALOUD

Poetry begs to be read aloud. After choosing a poem there are a couple of things to remember before you begin to read poetry aloud.

1. Respect the mood of the poem - is it somber and slow, light and playful, reflective and quiet, fast and funny, etc. Echo the mood of the poem in your reading aloud. Think about its images, the way it's shaped on the page and the way each line is broken. Think about the rhythms and the way it sounds to you when you read it aloud prior to reading it to students. Read the poem to students with all of this in mind.
2. Read slowly enough for students to catch images and wonder about meanings - don't read so fast that the poem passes over students without connecting. Don't read so slowly that the poem seems to drag or seems to be fragmented. Either way the reading may break the intended mood. Be sure to respect any white space, which many poets use as silent places. Poets also use the way lines are broken and the poem is arranged on the page as a code to indicate how poems should be read.
3. Read the poem all the way through - don't stop to "explain" it or to ask a question about the poem. Don't quiz students at the end of the reading or expect them to pull it apart and examine it for interpretation right away. Let the poem "sit" with the students for awhile so that they have time to think about it. In fact, it may be a good idea to read the poem several times, just so students can hear it and savor it. With each reading students become more familiar with the language and begin to make connections. One reading is often not enough time to provide adequate reflection opportunity for students.
4. Use a natural voice - don't let your voice become monotonous or overdramatic. Don't let your reading overshadow the poem and draw attention away from the poem itself. Try to do justice to the mood of the poem and the language it uses. Practice reading the poem out loud to another person, a cat, a dog, any audience that can be arranged, before reading it aloud to students. Each reading will help to cement the mood of the poem and to give naturalness to your voice.
5. Let students see the poem being read -- give each student a copy or copy it on larger paper. It is a good idea to read the poem first and then hand out copies, or bring out the larger copy. Then re-read the poem so that students can begin to study how a poem looks on the page.

Read poetry aloud. Read it often. Before long students will begin to connect poetry with their world and stop seeing it as an endlessly boring task done only in school. Perhaps, when your students are ready to begin another writing project, they will find their voices in poems of their own.

## ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

Assessment measures should follow the needs of the activity. It is suggested that students and teacher together assemble a rubric to guide the assessment of finished products, whether they be creative drama, puppets, writing projects, or other media.

As a facilitator and kid-watcher the teachers should always have at hand possibilities for note-taking. Whether it is done with post-it notes, a legal pad, labels, or index cards, the teacher should be adept at listening in on coversations and keeping track of presentations. It is suggested that the teacher have some form of note-taking system planned out before beginning the school year so that it will become a matter of course and not a thing remembered too late.

Rubrics should be developed to include those students who have special needs and those who may need more time to make connections. How well did the end product fit the goals of the activity? How much effort did the students make toward attaining the goal? Were the end products creative and thought provoking? Did the end production provide answers or ask more questions? Did each student do her best to meet the goals of the activity? Was each student successful, or does the activity require revision or re-planning? How did groups or individual students go about resolving problems and coming up with solutions? How did previous student understandings affect the product outcome?

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Having the soul of a poet myself, I often find it difficult to imagine that anyone finds it boring or unnecessary. Yet I know that for many people poetry is an impossible task that they would rather avoid. I always wonder how it is that they came to view poetry as the most undesirable reading they could ever be asked to do.

I hope that this poetry unit will change this particular view for some children. I hope that at least one child will learn to love poetry as I do. I hope that at least one child will become a poet herself (or himself, as the case may be).

This unit contains but a few ideas and could be expanded to include many other activity ideas and poems to use with them. I intend it to be a never-ending journey, a lifelong exploration. Isn't all of reading that way?

## A PRAYER FOR CHILDREN

We pray for children,
who put chocolate fingers everywhere
who like to be tickled,
who stomp in puddles and ruin their new pants,
who sneak Popsicles before supper,
who erase holes in math workbooks.
who can never find their shoes.
And we pray for those
who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,
who've never squeaked across the floor in new sneakers,
who never "counted potatoes,"
who are born in places we wouldn't be caught dead,
who never go to the circus,
who live in an X-rated world.
We pray for children
who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions,
who sleep with the dog and bury goldfish,
who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money,
who cover themselves with BAnd-Aids and sing off-key,
who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink,
who slurp their soup.
And we pray for those
who never get dessert,
who watch their parents watch them die,
who have no safe blanket to drag behind,
who can't find any bread to steal,

who don't have any rooms to clean up,
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
whose monsters are real.
We pray for children
who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,
who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food,
who like ghost stories,
who shove dirty clothes under the bed and never rinse out the tub,
who get visits from the tooth fairy,
who don't like to be kissed in front of the car pool,
who squirm in church and scream in the phone,
whose tears we sometimes laugh at and whose smiles can make us cry.
And we pray for those
whose nightmares come in the daytime,
who will eat anything,
who have never seen a dentist,
who aren't spoiled by anybody,
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,
who live and move, but have no being.
We pray for children
who want to be carried,
and for those who must;
for those we never give up on,
and for those who don't get a chance;
for those we smother,
and for those who will grab the hand of anybody
kind enough to offer

by Ina Hughes (FROM: *A Prayer for Children*, 1995, William Morrow Company, New York

**ANIMAL FAIR**

Connect poetry to science through children's favorite animals. Read poems about animals that describe them or the things they like to do. For example, the poem "At Night" by Aileen Fisher is a very short but very graphic representation of a cat's eyes.

**At Night**
by Aileen Fisher
(Out in the Dark and Daylight)

When night is dark
my cat is wise
to light the lanterns
in his eyes.

Or how about "The Octopus" by Ogden Nash? It is a marvelously funny poem that children of all ages will enjoy.

**The Octopus**
by Ogden Nash (Good Intentions)

Tell me, O Octopus, I begs,
Is those things arms, or is they legs?
I marvel at thee, Octopus;
If I were thou, I'd call me Us.

Or perhaps the imagery created by the rich language of poems such as "The Eagle" by Alfred Lord Tennyson or "Be Like the Bird" by Victor Hugo will become a touchstone piece for one of your students. At the very least, these poems will help create connections to "science facts" gleaned from the study of animals, their habitats and behaviors.

**The Eagle**
by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
(Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

**Be Like the Bird**
by Victor Hugo
(Scott, Foresman Anthology of Children's Literature)

Be like the bird, who
Halting in his flight
On limb too slight
Feels it give way beneath him,
Yet sings
Knowing he hath wings.

Zoo Doings by Jack Prelutsky is an entire collection of poems about animals. Other collections by Jack Prelutsky, and those of Shel Silverstein, contain lots of humorous poems about animals, their behaviors, and their habitats.

Many children will be familiar with the Broadway show "Cats," many of the characters of which were based on T. S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* published in 1939 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Two poems from this collection in particular describe cats quite well. Read "Macavity: The Mystery Cat" and "The Song of the Jellicles."

"Lone Dog" by Irene Rutherford McLeod captures the movement of a frisky dog on his way to another adventure. "Sunning" by James S. Tippett speaks to the lazy days of a well-loved older dog.

Other poems about animals from long ago will catch children's fantasy, such as Jack Prelutsky's *Tyrannosaurus Was a Beast* or "Something Big Has Been Here" from the book of the same name. Dinosaurs, a collection of poetry edited by Lee Bennett Hopkins, features poems about beasts of long ago by such noted poets as Myra Cohn Livingston, Lilian Moore and Valerie Worth.

There are even poems about bugs and other creepy crawlies. Rick Walton's *What to Do When a Bug Climbs in Your Mouth and Other Poems to Drive You Buggy* contains many selections that children will enjoy. The answer to

the question of the book's title? -- What do you do when a bug climbs in your mouth? C-R-U-N-C-H! These are just the poems for that little boy who comes home with a frog in his pocket and spends hours watching ants carry away a picnic.

For every poem you read about animals, make a copy, glue it to posterboard and laminate it. Then place all the poems in a basket or box in the reading corner for students to enjoy during free time. Students will also have these poems as references if they should choose to write their own poems about their favorite animals.

As you read poems about animals, talk with students about how they help to describe each animal, their motions, their behaviors, their eating habits, etc. For example, what facts do they know about cats that make the imagery of Aileen Fisher's "At Night" seem so accurate? How does "Sunning" by James Tippett describe an older dog sunning himself on the porch? What things do students know about aging animals that make Tippett's poem realistic?

## AT HOME WITH THE FAMILY

Although each child's family unit may vary, each child has some sort of "family" attachment. Most, though not all, will have siblings with whom they argue and play, punch and protect. Families are actually small communities (in some cases large communities, especially if one family unit has 10-12 children in it).

Each family has its own governing rules and its ways of doing things, including foods that are eaten, places they go, vacations they take, and other factors such as sleeping arrangements and religious beliefs. Cultural factors also affect the way families behave with each other and with other families in the same area.

Read this category of poetry when you are studying about families and communities. Some poems from this category are among the funniest and yet the most frank and true. Other selections are sad and poignant, bringing back memories of days gone by and unfulfilled promises.

Some examples for use in this large category are:

- "Family Needs" which is an anonymous offering from China
- "Our Washing Machine" by Patricia Hubbell
- "House Blessing" by John Bierhorst
- "Life's Not Been the Same in My Family" by Jack Prelutsky
- "My Brother Built a Robot" by Jack Prelutsky
- "I Wish My Father Wouldn't Try to Fix Things Anymore" by Jack Prelutsky
- "I Am Digging a Hole in the Ceiling" by Jack Prelutsky
- "Trust Me" by Judith Viorst
- "I Should Have Stayed in Bed Today" by Jack Prelutsky
- "Taught Me Purple" by Evelyn Tooley Hunt
- "Seasons" by Gordon & Bernice Korman
- "A Small Discovery" by James A. Emanuel
- "I Didn't" by Gordon & Bernice Korman
- "Mean Song" by Eve Merriam
- "Teenagers" by Cynthia Rylant
- "Answering Machine Message" by Gordon & Bernice Korman
- "TV" by Eve Merriam
- "My Mother Made a Meatloaf" by Jack Prelutsky
- "Stockings" by Valerie Worth
- "When I Grow Up" by Mary Ann Hoberman

Two good collections of "family" poems are *Poems for Brothers, Poems for Sisters* (Holiday House, 1991) selected by Myra Cohn Livingston and *Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers: A Collection of Family Poems* (Little & Brown, 1991) by Mary Ann Hoberman.

Some favorites from each book are:

**FATHERS, MOTHERS, SISTERS, BROTHERS**

"My Father"
"An Only Child"
"Four Generations"
"What Is a Family"

## POEMS FOR SISTERS, POEMS FOR BROTHERS

"All My Hats"
"Brother and Sister"
"He Makes Me So Mad"
"My Brother"
"The Only Child"
"Sisters"
"Skating in the Wind"

The study of family and community should be a continuous event throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, ask students to jot down words or phrases that mean "family" or "community" to them and arrange them as lines of a poem. Publish these poems and keep them in writing portfolios until the end of the year. Toward the close of the year, ask students to again jot down words or phrases that mean "family" or "community" to them, arrange them as lines in a poem, and then compare them to the poem they created earlier. Publish these poems also and publish them front-to-back with the earlier poem. Hopefully, by the time the end of the year comes, students will have learned a great deal about families and communities that will directly affect how they write the ending note to the family/community set of poems.

Talk with students about the differences in their poems about family and community. How are they the same? How are they different? What caused their ideas about family to change? etc. The teacher may choose to bind the poems together as a class donation to the media center or classroom library, or the poems may be mounted and sent home for parents and others to enjoy.

## POEM HIGHLIGHT

**What a Family?**
by Mary Ann Hoberman
*Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers*
(Little & Brown, 1991)

What is a family?
Who is a family?
One and another makes two is a family!
Baby and father and mother: a family!
Parents and sister and brother: a family!

All kinds of people can make up a family
All kinds of mixtures can make up a family

What is a family?
Who is a family?
The children that lived in a shoe is a family!
A pair like a kanga and roo is a family!
A calf and a cow that go moo is a family!

All kinds of creatures can make up a family
All kinds of numbers can make up a family

What is a family?
Who is a family?
Either a lot or a few is a family;
But whether there's ten or there's two in your family,
All of your family plus you is a family!

**Four Generations**
by Mary Ann Hoberman
*Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers*
(Little & Brown, 1991)

Sometimes when we go out for walks,
I listen while my father talks.

The thing he talks of most of all
Is how it was when he was small
And he went walking with his dad
And conversations that they had

About his father and the talks
They had when they went out for walks.

**My Father**
by Mary Ann Hoberman
*Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers*
(Little & Brown, 1991)

My father doesn't live with us.
It doesn't help to make a fuss;
But still I feel unhappy, plus
I miss him.

My father doesn't live with me.
He's got another family;
He moved away when I was three.
I miss him.

I'm always happy on the day
He visits and we talk and play;
But after he has gone away
I miss him.

**When I Grow Up**
by Mary Ann Hoberman
*Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers*
(Little & Brown, 1991)

When I grow up, I want to be
A grown-up who remembers me
And what it felt like to be small:
How much I liked to bounce a ball
And pump my swing high in the air
And think of flying everywhere.
How scared I was of doors that creak
Or being it in hide-and-seek
Or if my parents had a fight
Or when I had bad dreams at night.

How much I hated loud machines
And slimy worms and lima beans.
What fun it was to dig a hole,
To make a cake and lick the bowl,
To ride my bike all afternoon,
To plan on going to the moon,
To find an egg inside a nest
And have my best friend like me best.

## CINQUAIN POEMS

Cinquains are short poems of five lines in length, whose form can be based on words or syllables (Sunflower, 352). Read from a selection of cinquain poems of your own making or from previous school years and discuss with students their features. What makes them effective? Which words seem to work better than others?

Brainstorm topic ideas with students and have a recorder write them on a blackboard or a large sheet of chart paper. Topics may include many things, such as holidays, family members, friends, sports, pets, science subjects (space, ecology, the environment, weather, seasons, machines, volcanoes, hurricanes, animals, etc.).

Using their writing notebooks, have students write down one word descriptors for their chosen topic. To form the poem, ask students to state the topic on the first line; two words that describe the topic on the second line; three action words about what the topic does on the third line, a statement about how the topic makes them feel on the fourth line, and another name for the topic on the fifth line.

Ask student to recopy and illustrate their cinquains. Share them in class discussion and post them on a classroom bulletin board or wall for others to admire.

## COLLAGE POEMS

This idea comes from the minds of C. Hood Frazier and Charlotte Wellen, in their article "The Way In Is the Way Out: Poetry Writing in the Classroom" in the February 1998 issue of Voices from the Middle.

Take a favorite poem and re-type it in size 18 font. Ideally, the poem should be no longer than 20 lines. You may need to go up a font size depending on the font you are using. The words should be large, making them easy to read. Make enough copies of the poem for each student in the class.

Take a pair of scissors, get some helpers, and cut each poem into separate words (or short phrases, such as the desk, a pencil, one day, etc.). If you decide to use short phrases, break them up into different pieces for each copy of the poem. For example, if the line reads "and then a girl pretty and nice fell in the well and was lost from sight," you may choose to break it three times as shown below.

and then a | girl pretty | and nice | fell in | the well | and was | lost from | sight
and then | a girl | pretty and | nice fell | in the well | and was lost | from sight
and | then a | girl pretty | and nice | fell in the | well and | was lost from | sight

Place the pieces for each page in an envelope and place an envelope on each student's desk before they arrive for class. When students have found their way to their places, tell them that the words in the envelopes were used in the creation of a poem.

Their job is to play with the words and phrases, arranging and re-arranging them however they like to make their own poem. They may choose to work alone or in groups as they create their poem. (Normally, one class period is given to this exploration; however, time may need to be adjusted according to each classroom's needs.)

Once the words and phrases have been organized into poems, ask students to be sure to copy them down before a gust of wind destroys their creations. Teachers can provide separate sheets of paper for this or ask students to use their writing notebooks.

Now it is time to read each newly created poem out loud. After all the versions have been read and enjoyed, read the poem from which the pieces

came. This will help students to see that there is no one "correct" way to write a poem, but rather that each person's attempt is worthwhile. It might be a good idea to keep these poems around for students to read again in the reading corner or to take home and share with their brothers, sisters, parents, cousins, etc.

This type of poem can also be done by cutting away lines instead of words and phrases. In this way, the focus shifts to the structure of the poem and a poet's use of white space. Just for fun, cut away lines from two poems which are similar and see what happens. The originators of this hands-on exploration of language said that their students were "mesmerized" by this activity.

## DEATH & DYING

Death and dying are two concepts with which children have difficulty but yet have to face at some point in their lives, sometimes at a very early age. These are also concepts with which many adults have great difficulty and which they tend to ignore or push to the side when children ask about them. Our own fears of death and dying cause us to become ineffective in helping children deal with grief and loss.

A time to read poems about this subject is during the changing of the seasons from spring to summer to fall to winter. Poetry of this category will help children make necessary connections to the cyclical nature of life. For some children, poems of this nature may become a touchstone that helps them through the grieving process.

Some suggestions for poems to include in this category are:

- "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson
- "The Circle" by Nancy Wood
- "Death Be Not Proud" by John Donne
- "Don Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas
- "The Earth Called to My Friend" by Nancy Wood
- "Every Dying Man" by Jaan Kaplinski
- "Generations" by Nancy Wood

- "Grave" by Cynthia Rylant
- "I Heard a Fly Buzz -- When I Died" by Emily Dickinson
- "If We Must Die" by Claude McKay
- "Last Lines" by Emily Bronte
- "Poem" by Langston Hughes
- "Song" by Christina Rossetti
- "Tombstone" by Cynthia Rylant
- "An Unusual Cat Poem" by Wendy Cope
- "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks
- "Battle Won Is Lost" by Phil George
- "Vietnam" by Clarence Major
- "The Beads of Life" by Nancy Wood
- "The Butterfly" by Pavel Friedman
- "Charlie" by Pat Moon
- "Song of Life" by Charles MacKay
- "Still Falls the Rain" by Edith Sitwell
- "You Mustn't Quit" by Anonymous
- "The Circle" by Nancy Wood
- "The Web of Life" by Nancy Wood
- "The Old Wolf's Song" by Joseph Bruchac
- "Grandfather" by Lotte Kramer
- "You Never See a Bright Yellow Hearse" by Henry Normal
- "Anthem for Doomed Youth" by Wilfred Owen
- "Stillborn" by Dennis O'Driscoll
- "When My Grandaddy Died" by Cynthia Rylant
- "`Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning'" by Alice Walker

Although we do not like to think such is true, many children think a lot about death, especially those children who live in inner cities or in poverty for whom death is a daily event. And with the tragedy of AIDS falling all around them, children need to understand the cycle of life as they come to grips with frightening realities. As teachers, although we cannot do much to prevent the deaths from happening, we can do something to help our students cope with its reality.

If necessary, gather students together and talk about death and dying. Why are we so afraid of death and dying? What experiences have they had with it? Why does it hurt so much? How long will it take for us to grieve? What causes death? What can we do as a people to prevent more deaths?

One source for this topic is *Stopping for Death: Poems of Death and Loss*, a collection edited by Carol Ann Duffy (Henry Holt, 1996). Be careful in your choices, however, as some selections contain language that may be offensive to some students and parents. An example is the selection "How Can You Write a Poem When You're Dying of AIDS?" by James Sykes.

If you are studying the Holocaust or any of the wars in the United States or across the world, be sure to include poetry from that war. It will help students understand the victims of war and the people who fought them.

**DIAMANTE POEMS**

Diamante poems are another type of pattern poems, but in this case they generally compare opposites. They are more complex than cinquains but are very adaptable and may be used to create new poems about any contrasting ideas very easily. The structure of this pattern was devised by Iris Tiedt (Sunflower, 364).

From any subject they are currently studying, ask students to choose two contrasting ideas. Examples: MATH - add and subtract; SCIENCE - hot and cold; SOCIAL STUDIES - war proponents and opponents, etc. Students may choose an idea that creates opposites, such as pollution. Illustrate with examples of your own or previous school years.

Then, using their writing notebooks, ask students to explore the properties of each contrasting idea. They will want to think about words that describe each, words ending in "ing" and "ed" that refer to both ideas, etc.

Ask students to create their diamante poem using the following pattern:

LINE 1: a noun
LINE 7: another noun that is the opposite of the noun in line 1
LINE 2: two words that describe line 1
LINE 3: three "ing" or "ed" words that refer to the noun in line 1
LINE 4: four words that refer to both the noun in line 1 & the noun in line 7
LINE 5: three "ing" or "ed" words that refer to the noun in line 7
LINE 6: two words that describe the noun in line 7

After the poems have been edited, revised and come to a final edition, ask students to share their poems with the whole class. Post each poem on the classroom bulletin board or wall and invite others to share in your students' success.

**A FEAST OF POEMS**

Take collections of poetry off classroom shelves, then add to the collections from the school library, the public library, friends, etc. Spread the books out on tables and ask students to wander around and choose a book that they would like to explore. Give them plenty of time to explore and choose. Be sure to have several copies of collections if possible, so that there will be limited "disagreements" over choices. Give students the opportunity to work alone or in pairs.

Ask students to read through a few poems just for fun and inspiration. Then ask the students to disperse and read sitting at tables, under tables, on carpeted spaces, in corners, etc. Walk around and visit each group, showing them your writer's notebook and how you have collected favorite lines, entire poems, feelings, ideas, and reactions that came to mind as you read poetry. Invite them to do the same with their writer's notebooks.

Give students enough time to explore the poetry they have chosen and to talk with each other about their poems. Walk around the room and facilitate questions and wonderings. What made them choose that particular book? Why do some poems in the collection seem to stand out and others don't? Did any of the poetry seem to turn into pictures in their minds? Why do they

think this did/did not happen? What do they think the mood of the poem they like best is? What gives them this impression? Is this a funny poem, a sad one, a happy one, etc.? How would they present their poem to the rest of the class? Why would they choose that method of presentation?

## FOLK SONGS

Most children in elementary schools love to sing. Some of the most familiar songs are folk songs such as "I've Been Workin' On the Railroad," "Old MacDonald," "There's a Hole in the Bucket," and others.

Sing some of these familiar tunes along with students and then invite them to come up with songs of their own. While their musical abilities may vary, most elementary school children enjoy making up their own songs. Give them permission to use a tune and write new words to go along with it, being sure to let them know that they need to acknowledge the use of the tune in both their written version of the song and the performance of it. Students may wish to add motions to the song.

When songs are completed, ask students to perform them for the class, another class, or parents. Be sure to have them acknowledge that the tune came from another source where applicable. Add the new tunes to your classroom collection. An alternate response may be to make an audio tape or video tape, especially where students have added motions to go along with their songs.

## FOUND POEMS

Have students collect favorite lines from various sources in their writing notebooks. Students will get ideas from magazines, newspapers, cartoons, comics, matchbook covers, bulletin boards, books, advertisements, other people, the Internet, etc. Lines can be collected when students go on field trips, to the library, on walks, to sporting events, over the holidays, at family events, on special occasions and celebrations and much, much more.

It is important not to do this immediately when the school year begins but to wait until students have had a few months to explore the world with their writing notebooks always at hand. It might be a good idea to suggest that students keep a separate section in the back of the writing notebooks to collect their lines.

Ask students to review the lines they have collected and choose ten that are the most significant to them, whether because they are funny or because the lines reminded them of something else. Then ask students to copy these lines on paper and search them again, circling the words or phrases that they feel are most important to the connections they made with the lines that caused them to be collected. Next, have students break the words and phrases into line arrangements that bring attention to the meanings they hold. The poems that are created are poems "found" in the midst of other things.

Finally, when all pieces are completed, ask students to share their "found poems" with each other, either in small groups or a whole class session. Post poems on the classroom wall or a bulletin board. They may also be shared with another class or parents, or perhaps could become part of a schoolwide parents' night celebration.

## THE GENIUS OF MATH

"Arithmetic is where you have to multiply -- and you carry the multiplication table in your head and hope you won't lose it." That's what Carl Sandburg says in his poem "Arithmetic" from The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg (HBJ, 1950). Many children in your classroom will feel the same way -- frustrated because they cannot make the connections necessary to go forward in their math skills.

So much of students' lives is math dependent. You can't buy a candy bar without a little math knowledge. You can't keep score in a game without math. You can't count your marbles. You can't figure up tax. You can't do your taxes. You can't cook if you can't measure. You can't talk about the weather unless you know about the math of temperatures. You need math to sail a boat, steer a car, and fly a plane. You can't build a house or survey your land. Without math you can't even get up to go to school in the

morning. Everywhere they go, people are faced with math and its applications.

Just for fun and to take away a little of the frustration of math for those students for whom it is not a favorite subject, read a few math poems. Some examples are:

- "Arithmetic" by Carl Sandburg
- "Multiplication" by Donald Graves
- "Teaching Numbers" by Gary Soto
- "Eight Balloons" by Shel Silverstein
- "One Two" by Shel Silverstein
- "How Many, How Much" by Shel Silverstein
- "Keepin' Count" by Shel Silverstein
- "Triangular Tale" by Jack Prelutsky
- "Nine Mice" by Jack Prelutsky
- "A Pizza the Size of the Sun" by Jack Prelutsky

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU AND ME

"Getting to Know You" is a strategy taught to me by Dorothy Watson and Barbara Bell to help build community in the classroom. Using Shel Silverstein's "What's in the Sack" from Where the Sidewalk Ends (Harper Collins, 1974) as an introductory piece, they have each student bring in a sack of personal momentoes that tell about their lives to share with the entire class.

For example, after reading "What's in the Sack?" the teacher would then share her personal momentoes with the class. The momentoes could be pictures, books, tickets to a game or show, uniforms, dolls, car models, spurs, etc. -- anything that would tell a story about a person's life. Each student would be given 5-10 minutes to share her sack. Usually two people share a sack each day in whole class gatherings at the beginning of the year until each student has presented a sack. Other students may ask questions or make comments about the items presented.

Each day read another poem about becoming or being the person you are. Some examples are:

- "By Myself" by Eloise Greenfield
- "State of Mind" by Anonymous
- "It Can't Be Done" by Anonymous
- "Be the Best" by Douglas Malloch
- "pebbles" by Valerie Worth
- "When I Am Full of Silence" by Jack Prelutsky
- "Colors" by Shel Silverstein
- "Listen to the Mustn'ts" by Shel Silverstein
- "If I Were in Charge of the World" by Judith Viorst
- "My Name" by Lee Bennett Hopkins
- "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou
- "The Things That Haven't Been Done Before" by Edgar Guest
- "We Have Not Wings" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- "When I Think About Myself" by Maya Angelou
- "the drum" by Nikki Giovanni
- "What Women Are" by Nancy Wood
- "We Moved About a Week Ago" by Jack Prelutsky
- "Different Dreams" by Karla Kushkin
- "A Lazy Thought" by Eve Merriam
- "Listen Children" by Lucille Clifton
- "The Other Way to Listen" by Byrd Baylor
- "Rules" by Karla Kushkin
- "Sadie and Maud" by Gwendolyn Brooks

By the time all the students have shared their sacks, they will each know a little about another. It will also help to create an atmosphere in which students are not afraid to take risks or to ask their peers for assistance. They will perhaps also begin to realize that the teacher is a person too and that things learned in the classroom do have an effect on their lives outside the school's doors.

## GROUP CHEERS

Cheers are a good way to generate class or school spirit and to give students a break from studying by providing them a chance to move around and be active. Cheers lift our spirits and often provide encouragement and approval, something some are an excellent way to promote a special book or author, or even to tell others what the class is learning in math, science, social studies, etc.

Ask students to form small group of 4-6 and work together to choose an idea for their cheer. It may be a good idea to brainstorm ideas with a whole group discussion prior to breaking up into smaller groups. Students will need to think about the audience for whom they are creating the cheer and decide on actions that will go along with the words they plan to use.

If you have school cheerleaders in your classroom, have them demonstrate some of the cheers they do at sports events. This will help students learn about the use of body and arm movements to demonstrate their cheers. What kinds of things do the cheerleaders do during the cheer? Are there actions that could be copied? Do they always use whole words or do they sometimes spell them out? etc.

After the groups have completed their cheer and decided on the actions they need to go along with them, provide time for the groups to practice their cheers. Then have each group present the cheer they have written, whether it be to their classmates, another classroom, parents, or at a planned school variety show. Alternate presentations may include audio or video performances, or challenging another classroom to a cheering duel.

## HAIKU AND LIMERICKS

Haiku has a total of 17 syllables (a line of five syllables, a line of seven syllables, and another line of five syllables) and seem to be among the least likely poems to be enjoyed by children. Teachers often assume that their shortness will make haiku appropriate for children, but it is perhaps their brevity and succinctness of ideas that cause children to steer away from them. The need to have exactly five syllables, then seven syllables, then five syllables again may also cause children to not choose this form of poetry -

they seem to instinctively dislike the stiltedness of these poems and their tight structure. Haiku has, however, found its place with many Japanese poets who are among the best of its writers.

Limericks, on the other hand, are popular with children. These poems are brief also, being short five-line rhymed verse poems. Limericks are humorous, and the rhyming scheme and verse pattern are favored by children. Edward Lear made this form of poetry popular with the publication of his collection entitled Book of Nonsense published in 1846. While haiku should be shared with students, it is not necessarily a good idea to ask students to create their own versions of haiku. It should be given as a writing alternative but not as an obligatory writing project. Yet, if children feel that they are successful with haiku, they will more than likely take risks with longer forms, including such things as epics.

Limericks are fun poems to share on bus rides during field trips, as openers to the day's work, as ending pieces at the close of the day, and at other times that leave a small and sometimes much needed break in the daily classroom routine. Children who enjoy creating these rhyming fast-breaks may turn out to be the comedians in your classroom.

## HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Many teachers seem to think that their entire classroom curriculum should be focused around the celebration of every single holiday, from New Year's Day through Christmas. While it is fun to celebrate holidays, there are some children who will not be able to participate, whether for religious reasons, parental concerns, or other reasons.

There are poems for just about every holiday imaginable. Some are golden classics and others are pure bunk, created only for the purpose of making the curriculum fit the holiday. Teachers should be careful in the selection of poetry (or any other literature) that serves the holiday quest.

Collections such as *The Family Read-Aloud Holiday Treasury* (selected by Alice Low, Trumpet Club, 1991) include selections of prose and poetry for most of the major holidays. This particular collection also includes a "Celebrating Me" section, "Friendship Day," "Book Week," and the "First

Day of School," as well as selections Jewish holidays and celebrating summer vacation. Other collections, such as Diane Goode's American Christmas, focus only on one particular holiday.

Jack Prelutsky has published several books of poetry focuses on holidays, such as It's Halloween, It's Thanksgiving, and It's Christmas. His other collections also contain poems that could be added to the enjoyment of the holiday but are not necessarily earmarked as "Christmas" or "Thanksgiving" poems. The same is true of the work of Shel Silverstein.

Laurence Schorsch has published The Real Mother Goose Book of Christmas Carols, which many consider poetry set to music. There are several versions of "The Twelve Days of Christmas," including The 12 Days of Christmas: A Pop-Up Celebration by Robert Sabuda (Simon & Schuster, 1996) and The Twelve Days of Christmas by Jan Brett (Scholastic, 1986).

Another favorite poem from the Christmas season is "A Visit from St. Nicholas" by Clement Moore, which also has been published in several versions. These include: *'Twas the Night B'fore Christmas: An African-American Version*, retold and illustrated by Melodye Rosales (Scholastic, 1996*), Texas Night Before Christmas*, by James Rice (Pelican, 1990), *Hillbilly Night Afore Christmas*, text by Thomas Noel Turner (Pelican, 1991), and *Cajun Night Before Christmas*, edited by Howard Jacobs (Pelican, 1992). Teachers should take note that some of the versions listed are stereotypical portrayals of some cultures which may not be appreciated by students, parents, or administrators.

Read aloud poetry for the given holiday, but don't make it the center of your curriculum. Use poems as a way to relax and enjoy the holiday or to remember the significance of the holiday. Writing poems as an expression of holiday spirit or as memoir from a particular holiday should be viewed as a writing choice but not as a given.

**HISTORIC PERSPECTIVES**

As a connection to social studies in the classroom, read poetry from the period (or about the period). A good source for this reading is Lee Bennett Hopkin's collection entitled Hand in Hand: An American History Through Poetry (Simon & Schuster, 1994). A sample from this collection is:

POEM HIGHLIGHT:

**Vietnam**
by Clarence Major

he was just back
from the war

said the man they got
whites

over there now
fighting
us

and blacks over there
too

fighting us

and we can't tell
our whites
from the others

nor our blacks
from the others

& everybody
is just killing

& killing
like crazy

When studying the Civil War, use biographies along with poetry, including such things as the "Gettysburg Address" by Abraham Lincoln. Have students look up Civil War poetry on the Internet. Ask them to think about questions such as whether one side has more representation than the other.

Also use poems written by people living in different cultures, such as Native American poetry, African-American folk songs or Appalachian folk songs, haiku from Japanese poets, etc. Have students gather in groups and compare poetry from many cultures. What differences do they find? What does the poetry tell them about the culture from which the poems came?

Poetry with social studies connections is an excellent springboard for presenting the classics by poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Goethe, Moliere, etc. Students may come to understand the people of any given era or culture by listening to their writings.

Putting the poetry together with the history will help students make necessary connections to other countries and cultures that will serve them well in further studies and in understanding how the politics of one country directly affects the politics of another, e.g. what factors play a part in the declaration of war, immigration, exports, business, etc.

**HOT CHOCOLATE HOUSE**

After students have finished the model of Poet Study and put together their poet boards, books, etc., work with them to create a Hot Chocolate House. The idea is to create the atmosphere of a poetry reading in a coffee house. If it is winter, serve hot chocolate and sugar cookies for refreshments, and if it is summer, replace the hot chocolate with lemonade or juices.

Each group member selects a favorite poem to for the readings. This would be a good time to talk with students about the atmosphere of a coffee house with poetry readings, and then let them talk together about how they will recreate this atmosphere for their readings.

Students will then need to design and send out invitations; they may decide to invite parents, other classrooms, administrators, etc. or use this as part of their parent conference presentations. They will have to make a decision as to when to hold the readings (with the teacher facilitating).

Students may wish to add decorations or to wear costumes they think appropriate for such an occasion. The teacher will need to provide rehearsal

time for students to run through their readings so that students may make any necessary changes.

The day after the readings, gather the students together and talk about their presentation. What went well? What did not? What would they change? Did they forget anything? How were the refreshments received? What would they do differently next time? etc.

**IF ONLY POEMS**

Ask students to think about a special person, animal, place or thing and use their writing notebooks to jot down ideas, words, phrases, special feelings connected to their choice, things their subjects do for them to make them feel special, and any special wishes for that person and for themselves.

Ask students to create their poem according to the following pattern:

LINE 1: the name of the special person, animal, place or thing
LINE 2: two words describing (adjectives) line 1, connected by "and" or "but"
LINE 3: a typical action (verb) line 1 does and how line 1 typically does this action (adverb)
LINE 4: a comparison using the words "As as a/an "
LINE 5: an "If only" wish for line 1
LINE 6: an "If only" wish for themselves and line 1
LINE 7: (OPTIONAL) a when for line 5 and/or 6

After poems have been completed, ask students to copy them on certificate paper and create a border to frame them. Share the poems with the whole class and post them in the classroom. Students may also wish to place them in their writing portfolios for parent-teacher conferences and as work they are most proud of.

## MANY VOICES

Read selections of poetry from many cultures, including such poets as Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nancy Woods, Joseph Bruchac, Ann Nolan Clark, Byrd Baylor, Eloise Greenfield, and many, many others.

Some suggestions are:

- "Spirit Brothers" by Nancy Wood
- "I Too Sing America" by Langston Hughes
- "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks
- "Spirit Walker" by Nancy Wood
- "Mountains" by Ann Nolan Clark
- "Flute Song" by Joseph Bruchac
- "Everybody Needs a Rock" by Byrd Baylor
- "A Lazy Thought" by Eve Merriam

Ask students to use their reading journals to respond to questions such as: As you listened to these poems, what did you see in your mind? What did these poems make you think about? How different are these cultures from the one in which you live? If you were going to use poetry as a means of telling others about who you are and what your community is about, what things would you include?

Have students re-visit their bio-poems (or create one if they have not already done so). Share them in small groups and talk about the diversity they find there. Ask students to respond in their reading journals to the question, "What would the world be like if everyone were the same?" and "Could you live in a world were everything was the same? Why or why not?"

## OF THINGS LEGENDARY

Invite children into the world of fantasy by reading poems about mythical creatures and legendary deeds. Much fantasy writing and reading involves the suspension of belief in the "real world." The imagination reigns supreme in the realm and provides an opportunity for children to experiment with

images and explore the world of dreams and things wished for. Fantasy stretches the imagination and asks students to think about possibilities.

Listed below are a few suggestions for calling out the creativity of the imagination.

- "The Stone Troll" by J. R. R. Tolkien
- "Dragon Smoke" by Lilian Moore
- "The Unicorn" by Ella Young
- "A Mermaid Song" by James Reeves
- "Overheard on a Saltmarsh" by Harold Monro
- "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" by Robert Browning
- "Kubla Khan" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- "The Dragons Are Singing Tonight" by Jack Prelutsky
- "hist whist" by E. E. Cummings
- "The Kraken" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- "The Highwayman" by Alfred Noyes
- "dance poem" by Nikki Giovanni
- "in Just" by E. E. Cummings
- "The Fiddler of Dooney" by William Butler Yeats
- "For a Mocking Voice" by Eleanor Farejeon

Invite students to dream up their own fantastic world, complete with characters, setting, plot, etc. They may choose to write a poem or a short story about a particular legendary act, person, animal, etc. Share their creations within the classroom and with other classrooms, parents, administrators, etc.

This particular poetry lends itself well to pure pleasure but at times is incredibly packed with symbolism. This would be a good time to introduce the concept of symbolism and concepts such as good triumphing over evil.

**PICTURE POEMS**

Another idea from Lee Bennett Hopkins and his book *Pass the Poetry, Please!* is to allow students to create a poem that goes with a drawing or

painting they have made. Students may choose to do a poem about a sculpture or other artistic endeavor also.

If students wish, they may find it easier to write a poem from someone else's pictures. Or, they may choose to work in groups and write a series of poems for pictures that look very much the same to them.

Another alternative is to use paintings or drawings done by children's authors (or others). Place the paintings or drawings (or other works) on the tables in the classroom and ask students to walk around and study them for 10-15 minutes. Then ask students to select materials from the writing center and write a poem that they think fits with the piece that they found the most interesting to them. Do not collect the pieces but leave them on the tables so that students may return to view the pieces to see if they think their words fit the piece they selected to write about (e. g. to which they found connections).

Once the poems have been completed, gather students together, along with the pieces of art and read them aloud. It is important to have the pieces there so that students may think about the connections made between words and works. Talk about the poems that were created. How were they different/same? Were any pieces in particular written about by more students than others? Which pieces did the students prefer and why? etc.

After all the poems have been shared, bind them together in a folder along with photos of the pieces of artwork to which the poems were addressed. Store the collection in the classroom library.

**A PINCH OF PRELUTSKY**

Jack Prelutsky has been writing poetry for children for several years. His poems are enjoyed not only by elementary school children but also by young adults and adults as well. Just for fun read a poem from one of his collections aloud during "Drop Everything and Read" time or as a quick starter for the morning.

Prelutsky is a very prolific poet. Some of his collections of poetry include the following:

- Something Big Has Been Here
- The New Kid on the Block
- A Pizza the Size of the Sun
- Zoo Doings
- It's Thanksgiving!
- It's Christmas!
- Tyrannosaurus Was a Beast
- The Dragons Are Singing Tonight
- Ride a Purple Pelican
- Beneath a Blue Umbrella

Some of my personal favorites from Prelutsky's collections are:

#SOMETHING BIG HAS BEEN HERE

- "Something Big Has Been Here"
- "The Turkey Shot Out of the Oven"
- "I Am Tired of Being Little"
- "They Tell Me I'm Peculiar"
- "I Should Have Stayed in Bed Today"
- "Life's Not Been the Same in My Family"
- "I Met a Rat of Culture"
- "My Brother Built a Robot"
- "Grasshopper Gumbo"
- "A Remarkable Adventure"
- "My Mother Made a Meatloaf"
- "Today I'm Going Yesterday"
- "I'm Digging a Hole in the Ceiling"
- "I'm Sorry"
- "I Wish My Father Wouldn't Try to Fix Things Anymore"
- "Mold, Mold"
- "I Lost My Invisible Puppy"

#THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

- "The New Kid on the Block"
- "I Wonder Why Dad Is So Thoroughly Mad"
- "Alligators Are Unfriendly"
- "I'm Thankful"
- "I've Got an Incredible Headache"
- "Homework, Oh Homework"
- "My Baby Brother"
- "Be Glad Your Nose Is on Your Face"
- "I Found a Four-Leaf Clover"
- "New York Is in North Carolina"
- "An Alley Cat with One Life Left"
- "Today Is Very Boring"
- "My Mother Says I'm Sickening"
- "When Dracula Went to the Blood Bank"
- "I'm Disgusted with My Brother"
- "I'm the Single Most Wonderful Person I Know"
- "My Sister Is a Sissy"
- "I'm in a Rotten Mood"
- "I'm Falling Off a Mountain"

#A PIZZA THE SIZE OF THE SUN

- "A Pizza the Size of the Sun"
- "Miss Misinformation"
- "When I Grow Up"
- "Sardines"
- "My Gerbil Seemed Bedraggled"
- "I Made a Perpetual Motion Machine"
- "An Extraterrestrial Alien"
- "I Am a Mirror Image"
- "I Think My Computer Is Crazy"
- "Bugs! Bugs!"
- "I'm Wearing an Enchanted Hat"
- "I Am Riding on a Cloud"
- "I Do Not Like the Sunshine"
- "I Got Out of Bed"
- "There Are Zebras on the Ceiling"
- "I'm Drifting Through Negative Space"

- "I Do Not Wish to Go to School"
- "I'd Never Need a Haircut"
- "When I Am Full of Silence"
- "If"

**POCKETS OF POETRY**

This idea comes from Lee Bennett Hopkins, a collector of poetry, in his book Pass the Poetry, Please! (Harper & Row, 1987).

Cut out several large pocket shapes from posterboard and have students help decorate them. Each pocket should be labeled with a particular category of poetry that you and your students plan to study, e.g. "Bugs," "Animals," "Memories," "I Am Special," "Seasons," etc. Hopkins suggests that pockets be painted with tempera or covered with patterned fabric or construction paper.

Leaving the tops open, staple the pockets to a classroom bulletin board and insert several poems in each pocket. Read "Keep a Poem in Your Pocket" from Beatrice Schenck de Regniers' book Something Special and post a copy near the pockets. Encourage students to pick out and read a poem during their free time. Also encourage them to add to the collection you have started. At the end of the year, gather students together and pull the poem pockets down. Sift through the collection and talk about the poems that were already there and those that were added. Bind the collection and add it to the classroom library. A cover page with all the names of the contributors should be included as part of the anthology.

**THE POEM GENERATOR**

This idea also comes from the minds of C. Hood Frazier and Charlotte Wellen, in their article "The Way In Is the Way Out: Poetry Writing in the Classroom" in the February 1998 issue of *Voices from the Middle*.

Provide 5-10 half-sheets of paper to each student. Have students gather into groups of no more than ten and form a circle within their groups. (Groups of

3-6 will also work but larger groups are more enjoyable.) Using spinners with the alphabet on them, ask each group member to spin for a letter from which they will select a topic for their poem.

Students then write for eight minutes on their chosen topic. At the end of the first round, the poems are passed to the person on their left. Students now read the poem they receive, and using the best words, phrases or lines from the poem (by their choice), they write another poem of their own. Again, they write for eight minutes. When the time is up, the new poem is stapled to the top of the first poem and passed again to the person on their left.

The next person will read both poems and select the best words, phrases or lines from each and write a new poem. After eight minutes passes again, the new poem is stapled to the top of the others and passed on to the left once again. The circle continues until each person has had a chance to write a new poem.

Collect the group poems and place them in the reading corner for students to study. "They will be fascinated to see which of their own words and lines have been used . . . they will also want to read and/or hear the other poems in the group, even in the whole class." (Frazier and Wellen, 5)

Make copies of all the poems so that each student may have them, both their own piece and the pieces from the rest of the group. Use these as part of each student's portfolio. They will be pleased to see that they have created so much from such a small start.

## THE POEM JAR

Objects could be a toy car, some autumn leaves, a rock, a flower, small plastic or stuffed animals, a ball, paper clips, a pencil, an eraser, a stick of chewing gum, a rubber snake, a small umbrella, etc. The object can be anything. Its purpose is to jump start students' thinking. If you use a five gallen fish tank, you could use live animals such as a turtle or lizard; fill a small fishbowl and put in a guppy or an interesting fish or two.

Next to the jar leave pencils and sheets of paper, lined and unlined, for students to use as observation tools and for the writing down of creative ideas for their own poetry or prose. Leave a small box nearby so that students may fill it with poems of their own that may be shared with others. Also place a suggestion box near the jar for students to suggest ideas for the next week's poetry jar.

The "Poem Jar" is a fun way to think about poetry while at the same time providing opportunity for students to do research on whatever is in the jar and time for them to wonder about the world and to collect ideas for future writing projects.

**POEM MOBILE**

Have children collect copies of their favorite poems and place them in a 9 X 12 brown kraft envelope. As part of a celebration of poetry, ask students to construct mobiles of a few poems from their collection. Students may choose to work individually or in small groups of two or three.

Have students copy their poems on to posterboard. They may choose to illustrate the copied poems or use posterboard to create items that illustrate the poems they have chosen. For example, if a child chose a poem about fish, he may choose to draw and cut out a fish shape and add it to the mobile.

Attach string to each chosen poem or illustration, making sure that each string is of a different length. Then attach the strings of the poems and illustrations to a straw or a square (triangle, octagon, etc.) piece of cardboard. Be sure that each mobile's construction crew is identified on the mobile. Have each group do a short "show and tell" of their mobile and talk about the poems they chose. Finally, pin mobiles to a classroom bulletin board or hang them from a "clothesline" across the reading corner.

## POEMS FOR TWO VOICES

Use some of the poems from Paul Fleischman's *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* to entice students into creating their own versions of poems for two (or more!) voices. "Chrysalis Diary" from this collection is a favorite and has ties back to science. Invite one of your students to read the poems with you, or ask a parent to take part as a surprise event for the students.

Ask students to work in small groups, usually not more than 2-3 per group, to create their own version of poems for more than one voice. Subjects are negotiable within the groups. Provide copies of JOYFUL NOISE for students to review for ideas. Provide time for research in areas that may require it (science, math, social studies, etc.).

When the poems are ready (in written form) to be read aloud, provide time for students to share their creations in whole classroom meetings. Or, as an alternate, use their poems as the background for parent-teacher meetings. One idea is to have students take turns reading their poems to parents waiting to talk with the teacher. Another idea is to have students either audio record or video tape their readings; then set up an area in the classroom for parents to visit during wait times at parent-teacher conferences. The poems could also be presented as part of a curriculum celebration for the school, or could be a choice for performing in another classroom.

## POEM HIGHLIGHT

**Chrysalis Diary**
by Paul Fleischman

November 13:
Cold told me
to fasten my feet
to this branch,
to dangle upside down
from my perch,
to shed my skin,
to cease being a caterpillar
and I have obeyed. and I have obeyed.
December 6:

Green,
the color of leaves and life,
has vanished! has vanished!
The empire of leaves
lies in ruins! lies in ruins!
I study the
brown new world around me
I fear the future.
I hear few sounds.
Have any others of my kind
survived this cataclysm?
Swinging back and forth
in the wind,
I feel immeasurably alone.
January 4:
I can make out snow falling.
For five days and nights
it's been drifting down.
I find I never tire of
watching the flakes
in their multitudes
passing my window.
The world is now white.
Astounding. Astounding.
I enter these
wondrous events
in my chronicle
knowing no reader
would believe me.
February 12:
An ice storm last night.
Unable to see out
at all this morning.
Yet I hear boughs cracking
and branches falling.
Hungry for sounds
in this silent world,
I cherish these,
ponder their import,
miser them away

in my memory,
and wit for more. and wait for more.
March 28:
I wonder whether
I am the same being
who started this diary.
I've felt stormy inside
like the weather without.
My mouth is reshaping,
my legs are dissolving,
wings are growing
my body's not mine. my body's not mine.
This morning,
a breeze from the south,
strangely fragrant,
a red-winged blackbird's
call in the distance,
a faint glimpse of green
in the branches.
And now I recall
that last night
I dreamt of flying.

FROM: Fleischman, P. (1988). Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices. NY: Trumpet Club.

**POEMS FROM ANOTHER WORLD**

Connect poetry to space science by including poems about space, other worlds, technology, planets, etc. as part of your curriculum. Open your study of space with a poem from Myra Cohn Livingston's collection entitled Space Songs (Scholastic, 1988).

**POEM HIGHLIGHT**:

**DREAMERS**
by Myra Cohn Livingston

Space is a kaleidoscope,
a shifting dream
of sphere and shape;

Each realm, each body
named
on Earth,
transfigured in the sky.

Dazzled by light,
by a resplendent beam,

some soar skyward,
some go up in flame,

like stars and starstuff,
born to live,
to blaze,
and die.

As you read some of the poems, ask students to listen and to jot down phrases and words that create pictures in their minds about the concept of space exploration. Place information books about space, planets, stars, etc. in a crate or on a shelf in the classroom library for students to use as research resources.

Form small groups of 5-6 students and have them share the words and phrases that appealed to them. From these snippets of other poems, students create a group poem about space to be presented to the entire class. Presentations should be 2-3 minutes long and may be choral readings, drawings, mobiles, impromptu skits, etc.

After the unit on space has been completed, ask students to re-visit their writing notebooks and "space words" listings. Ask them to respond in their reading journals to the prompt: My misunderstandings about space

exploration . . . -- or perhaps: When some poets write of "the heavens," they mean more than just the physical position of stars and planets. What do you think they are talking about? The intent here is to give students an opportunity to work with writing prompts that may be part of end-of-grade testing while at the same time reinforcing concepts learned in science.

**THE POEMS WE HEAR**

Help students learn to use their senses by taking them for a walk around the school. Specifically tell them, "Today we are going on a listening walk. We will want to take our writing notebooks along so that we can record all the sounds we hear." (If you have a hearing impaired student in your classroom, turn this walk into a seeing walk.)

Invite parents to go with you on the walk, being sure to explain the purpose of the walk and also being sure to let them know what is expected of the students. This way, if some students lag a bit behind others, they will not be unsupervised. Parents should be instructed to act as guides and observers, whose task it is to help students become aware of the sounds around them.

During the walk, students stop to write down all the things they hear in their writing notebooks. While they are collecting sounds, students will begin to connect the need to take notes and how notes help writers to create images with words. In this way they can begin to see the purpose behind taking good notes and using them as reference points.

After coming inside, read a couple of poems that require students to listen for the "sounds of language." Good examples are "The Pickety Fence" by David McCord, "From a Railway Carriage" by Robert Louis Stevenson, "Lullaby" by Christina Rosetti, "I Haven't Learned to Whistle" by Myra Cohn Livingston and "the drum" by Nikki Giovanni. One of the most fun poems to read that plays on language connections is "Eletelephony" by Laura E. Richards. "Hush, Little Baby" is a traditional poem that mothers all over the world have used to sing their babies to sleep. "Wynken, Blynken and Nod" is another poem that is often used as a way of luring children into sleep. Read both these poems and talk with students about why these poems tend to make them feel sleepy and contented.

Later in the day, or the next day, ask students to re-visit their writing journals and think about the notes they made while on their "listening walk." Gather them together and talk about the sounds they heard. Which sounded like poetry? Which made them think of an event in their lives or reminded them of something familiar? Did everyone hear the same things? Why? etc. This is a good time to talk about the senses and how they help us in our perception of the world. It is also a good time to talk about those who cannot hear and discuss how this one small thing makes a big difference in how one is able to progress through life.

Other senses may be incorporated such that all the senses could be explored. Students could go out on another walk, this time a seeing walk in which they take note of all the things that catch their eyes. Students can explore the sense of touch by working with items placed in a box while blindfolded. The object is to name what is in the box without looking at it. A similar experiment could be done with the sense of smell.

**POET OF THE MONTH**

As part of the celebration of poetry in the classroom, highlight a poet each month. A section of a classroom bulletin board(about the size of a posterboard) will serve as the host site. A display of the poet's poetry could be set up on a shelf or in a basket in the classroom library. The display may include audiotaped readings of the poet's work.

Include on the site a picture of the poet (if possible) along with some biographical information discovered by the students and a pocket (or envelope) of some of the poet's works. Encourage children to add copies of their favorite poems for this poet to the pocket.

Students may choose to feature a favorite poet or use a calendar of poets' birthdays to feature one poet for the month of their birth. Lee Bennett Hopkins (Pass the Poetry, Please!, pg. 200) provides a listing of some poets' birthdays that would be helpful to students in choosing a poet of the month. A few for each month are listed below.

- January: Carl Sandburg, N. M. Bodecker
- February: Langston Hughes
- March: Lilian Moore, Robert Frost
- April: William Shakespeare
- May: Edward Lear, Eloise Greenfield
- June: Gwendolyn Brooks, John Ciardi, Nikki Giovanni
- July: Eve Merriam, Karla Kuskin
- August: Myra Cohn Livingston, Ogden Nash
- September: Jack Prelutsky, Aileen Fisher
- October: E. E. Cummings, Valerie Worth
- November: David McCord
- December: Emily Dickinson

Encourage students to add biographical data they find at Internet sites or in books of poetry. Another idea is to have students copy and illustrate a favorite poem from the poet of the month that is placed into a bound anthology for the classroom library.

**POET STUDY**

The object of a poet study is to encourage students to become familiar with a poet and her poetry. As a model for students, read 7-10 poems over the course of a few days by one poet to give them the flavor of the poet's work. It may be beneficial to choose a poet with whom the students are already familiar. Copy the poems as handouts for the students.

If possible, provide a photograph of the poet and have on hand biographical information to share with them. It is important for readers of all ages to know about a poet's life, how and why she wrote, how she lived, and how the world received her poetry.

As the poems are read each day, provide time for the students to talk about the poems and to re-read the poems again. Then ask students to reflect on the poems they have heard and write responses to them in their reading notebooks. Suggest that the students think about things such as what they noticed about the poems, what they liked or did not like about the poems, did any of the poems remind them of something and if so what, were there any words or concepts in the poetry that they did not understand, etc.

Gather the students together and talk about their reading notebook entries. This is the time for them to share questions, wonderings, and understandings of the poetry. Post each poem on poster board and write comments from students on the boards for them to review and think about further. As they continue to discuss their connections to the text, they will begin to make more connections and will help each other think about the ideas that the poet is trying to convey to them as readers.

Set up shelves with poetry collections of several poets. Ask students to select their top three favorites to study and have them form groups of 4-6 students to study each poet. Students then take their set of poetry collections and begin reading the poems in an effort to decide which ones they like the best. Ask each group to read the poems to each other to decide which 7-10 poems are their favorites. Once they have decided on their favorite poems, they should then work on copying them and illustrating them. Once the poems have been copied and illustrated, place them in a group folder.

Each group's next task is to find out more about their poet. If you have author information, provide it for the students to study. Another alternative is to provide computer time so that students may search the Internet for information about their poets. Each group should then be asked to complete a short poet biography page, complete with a picture if one is available to them.

Once the poet biography page is completed, give the students their poetry folders and provide poster board, markers, glue, etc. so that they may display their poets and poetry. Be sure to provide alternatives for display choices, such as a large poster billboard, a news letter, a compilation of favorite poems, etc. Share the students' work with others by using one of the suggested culminating activities.

**SUGGESTED CULMINATING ACTIVITIES**: Poetry Anthology, Poetry Festival, Poets' Fair, Hot Chocolate House

## POETRY ANTHOLOGY I

After students have finished the model of Poet Study, take them on an excursion outside the school and within the school to collect ideas for poems of their own in their writing notebooks Ask them to think about ideas in the lunchroom, on the playground, at home, at church, etc., that might become a poem for them.

After collecting ideas for a couple of days, ask students to begin putting together their poems. This is a good time to talk again about the way poems look, what white space is all about, why some poems do not rhyme and others do, why some are short and some are long, things that make a poem a good one to some and not to others, what sorts of things poets write about, what kinds of language poets use, etc.

During writing time students should be encourage to edit and re-think their poems. This is a good time to hold conferences with them about their writing and to share things with them that might help them make more connections, to talk about things they are having problems with in their writing, to do short mini-lessons on rhythm and rhyme, etc.

When students are satisfied with their final results, provide each with paper to re-copy the poem and any art materials to help illustrate it. When all poems are ready, collect and bind them as the class poetry anthology. Be sure to include an index of poets and poems. It might be a good idea to have each student write a short bio-graph and include them as an appendix to the anthology, with pictures if possible.

Invite parents to share in the donation of the anthology to the school media center. Make it a little ceremony in which students do all the presenting. The students will have to decide who will be the moderator, who will introduce the class, who will introduce the school librarian, who else should be invited, make announcements or invitations to the ceremony and distribute them, etc. The teacher may need to give some assistance to students to help set up a time and date on which to hold the ceremony, but should facilitate students doing these things if they so choose.

## POETRY ANTHOLOGY II

Students may choose to bind their collections of poetry of their favorite poets (bibliographical information included) for the classroom library, which would then become an item available for check-out and for selection of personal reading time in the classroom. This would be an excellent time to talk about copyrights and how to make reference to who wrote the poem and where the poem was found (in a book of poetry, an anthology, on the Internet, etc.).

Students may also choose to donate their collections of poetry to another classroom, at which point they would need to find a time to read some of the poems to another class and arrange a donation ceremony with another teacher. This would be a good way to hold a celebration, including refreshments, for both classrooms so that everyone may participate in celebrating their thinking and learning and the joy of poetry itself.

## POETRY FESTIVAL

After students have finished the model of Poet Study and put together their poet boards, books, etc., work with them to create a Poetry Festival. The idea is to create a festival atmosphere in which to display the class poets' work.

Each group is asked to select a poem to be read aloud for their favorite poet. They may choose to have one person read the poem, to do a choral reading, to do a unison reading, to act out the poem as it is read (if possible), etc. Each group will then take center stage to present their poem.

The students will need to decide who should attend the festival and then send out invitations and decorate the room. Decorations could include posters and signs, balloons, character dress-ups, etc. Each group should "advertise" their poet at a table (or other area) and be ready to show visitors their collections/displays. A good suggestion is to have an opening free time for visitors to circulate among the groups and look at their poetry collections, enjoy some refreshments, etc. before the show begins.

After the show has been given, the last visitor exits, and any cleanup activity is taken care of, gather the students for a meltdown time to wind down and discuss their presentation. How did things go? Would they have done anything differently? If so, what? What went well and what didn't. Were there any unexpected problems? If so, how could they be resolved?

## POETRY FAVORS

Susie Garber provides teachers with a fun way to decorate for poetry celebrations that center on the reading or acting out of students' favorite poems.

Invite parents to your celebration with invitations made by students illustrations of favorite poems. Using paper lunch sacks, have students decorate them and ten fill them with poems rolled up as scrolls and tied up with yarn. In the scroll include a letter from you explaining why poetry is so important in your classroom.

For the celebration use plain paper placemats on which students have printed and illustrated their favorite poems. Students may also use their own poems for the placemats. Have each student sign their placemat. As parents arrive, ask them to look at the placemats and be seated where they find the one signed by their child. After all the poems have been presented for the event and the refreshments have been enjoyed, tell parents to take their child's placemat home.

## POETRY WITH RHYTHM

Gather students together in the reading area and ask if they know any jingles from either TV or radio advertisements. After students have shared some of the jingles they hear every day, read "The Pickety Fence" by David McCord, "From a Railway Carriage" by Robert Louis Stevenson, "Beautiful Soup" by Lewis Carroll, and "Poem to Mud" by Zilpha Keatley Snyder. Discuss with students the "feel" of these poems. Why are they so effective and so memorable?

Brainstorm with students ideas for topics to create their own rhythm poems. The suggestions could be anything from trains to mud to baseball to running to sleeping to laughing to friends to snakes. Have a student record the ideas on a blackboard or large sheet of chart paper for students to use as a reference.

Using their writing notebooks, have students select a topic important to them and begin thinking of ways to describe their topic. They may want to write a few sentences and then choose 3 or 4 words that most aptly fit their idea. They may choose to use a web and begin from the center with their topic and use the spokes to call up words that describe the center piece.

Leave the read-aloud poems posted for students to reference, as well as any others that seem to have a rhythm all their own. Walk around the room and talk with students about their thinking and writing. When students have chosen the words or phrases that best describe their topic, have them decide on the order of the words or phrases and put together a rhythm poem of their own. After the poems have been copied down, gather students together and share their creations. Some creations (such as McCord's "Pickety Fence") could be demonstrated so that others can really "hear" the poem.

Talk with students about the words and phrases they chose. How are they alike? (nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives) Which words or phrases are the most effective? Why?

**POETRY WITH SHAPE**

Make copies of concrete poems for students to look over. Place a stack of poems on each table in the classroom and provide time for students to wander around each table and read the poems. After 20 minutes ask students to remain at the tables they are at, or gather students in the reading corner to talk about what they have seen and read.

Discuss with students the features of concrete poems. Is the form effective? How are the shapes alike or not alike? Do the words in the poem match the picture they draw? etc.

Brainstorm with students some ideas for creating their own concrete poems and have a student write them on a blackboard or chart paper. Ask students if they think they could create this type of poem centered around some of the subjects they have been studying, such as the heart or trees in science, geometric shapes in math, a historic landmark or a state in social studies, etc. Perhaps some students may wish to think about sports, such as football, basketball, baseball, soccer, racing (cars or horses), swimming, running, etc. Students may select from this list or use a topic of their own.

Provide materials for students to create their own poetry shapes. When the creations are finished, gather students in a large group and share their creations. Post all creations on a classroom wall or bulletin board.

**POETS' FAIR**

After students have finished the model of Poet Study and put together their poet boards, books, etc., work with them to create a Poets' Fair. The idea is to create a fair booth for each selected poet.

Each group designs a booth in which to display the work of their selected poet. Each student selects a favorite poem to trade at the booths. Multiple copies of the poetry are made so that visitors may trade a favorite poem of their own for one of the poems from that booth.

When the booths are ready, students may choose to invite other students, parents, administrators, etc. to visit their fair. The price of admission to the fair is a copy of the visitor's favorite poem. The admission poems are then bound for classroom use, to be checked out and taken home to read, or perhaps to be used as a personal reading choice during sustained silent reading.

Students may wish to add decorations or to wear costumes they think appropriate for a fair. They may also choose to provide refreshments. The teacher will need to facilitate invitations, etc. for the celebration.

## POETRY WORKSHOP

Many students fear poetry because they have had to dissect it. A poetry workshop may help to dissolve that fear and to clear up misconceptions that students often have about poetry, such as that it is boring, you only do it in the classroom, it's not any fun, it's useless, and so forth.

Begin by introducing poetry to students at the beginning of the school year. Use the first chapter of Anastasia Krupnik by Lois Lowry (Bantam Skylark, 1979) to introduce poetry to her classroom. Then talk with students about the "rules" for poetry (as they see them) and post those rules in the classroom as a reference point as students dig into poetry. Share Eve Merriam's "How to Eat a Poem" (A JAR OF TINY STARS, 1996) with the students and continue to discuss poetry, what students think it is and is not. Other good readings include "Things" and "Way Down in the Music" by Eloise Greenfield; "Poetry Is Images" and "Vital Question" by Gordon & Bernice Korman.

In the reading corner set up crates or shelves of poetry for the students to enjoy. Each day share poems with the students, either ones you have chosen or that the children have chosen. Ask students to share their concerns about poetry, such as how to choose poems, why poems are arranged on the page by the poet in a particular manner, how to think about words and images for their own poetry, what to do when a poem makes no sense to them, etc.

Schedule a workshop period for one day of the week, during which time poems are read and students are given time to create their own poems. Part of the time given over to poetry workshop period should also be devoted to teaching mini-lessons about authors' crafts and reading poetry aloud. Library time should be scheduled before the workshop so that students may choose new poems and bring them to class to share.

At the beginning of the poetry workshop, provide 20-30 minutes for students to read poems independently. During the independent reading time students may wish to use post-it notes to mark favorite poems for others to read at another time. Each student should select a poem to which he would like to respond or which she would like to talk about during the authors' craft study.

Students should spend another 20-30 minutes talking in small groups about the poems they have been reading. Why did they choose a particular poem?

Did they like someone else's choice better than their own? What do they notice about the author's choice of words or the craft of the poem?

During both the independent reading and group sharing time, the teacher should walk around and take notes on what the students are doing. Which poems are they choosing? What kinds of comments are being made? How are students making their choices about poems? etc.

Gather students together and read aloud the favorites. Talk with students about respecting the manner in which a poem is laid out on the page, how punctuation affects the reading of a poem as much as white space, how the words chosen create the desired effect on readers (or don't), what kinds of images are created by the words chosen, etc.

Use this time to also talk with students about poems that were confusing to them or hard to understand. What makes them confusing/hard to understand? What can readers do to help them overcome such obstacles to enjoying the poems? Were there any poems the students considered too good to miss? If so, why? This is a good time to talk about elements found in poetry such as rhyme, alliteration, repetition, onomatopoeia, imagery, comparisons, symbolism, wordplay, use of punctuation (no capital letters or no punctuation at all), etc.

The next component is time given over to students for writing poems of their own or responding to poems they have read. This time should also be used for students to share their responses or poems with other students so that they may get some feedback on their work.

Next, gather students together again and talk about writers' craft. How has the craft of a poet they have been reading affected their own writing? What things are they working on? What things do they notice that other writers do?

To close the workshop have students complete a workshop evaluation in which they have a chance to think about what has happened during the workshop and about things that could be done to improve the experience.

## RHYMES FOR ALL OCCASIONS

Children and rhymes seem to go together. Even high school students are into rhymes, though they may profess that they are not -- what do they claim cheers at sporting events to be? In reality, they are rhymes chosen for the specific purpose of cheering on their team to win and taunting the other team to lose.

Rhymes have been recited, chanted and sung for generations. Some include hand-clapping, other ball-bouncing, and still others require counting-out. Children enjoy putting actions to the rhymes and the actions help them to develop important motor skills.

Jump-rope rhymes developed along with the sport, and in some areas double jump-rope competitions have become very competitive games. At first only boys were allowed to compete. Each boy had his own rope and the objective was to see who could jump the highest, the fastest, or the most times before tripping.

Eventually jump-rope competitions were taken over by more and girls; boys continued to jump to some extent but usually joined a group of girls. Girls sometimes jumped individually but more often jumped in groups. Several girls shared one long rope. The girls holding the ends of the ropes and doing the turning were called enders and the girls doing the jumping were called (of course) jumpers. The job of the enders was to turn the rope evenly and rhythmically. Enders took their turn at jumping so that all members of the group became competent at each job.

As the sport of jump-rope progressed, the teams added actions and stunts that were performed as they jumped. Rhymes were added to help the enders keep the rhythm of the rope going, while at the same time adding poetry and humor to the game.

Street rhymes are familiar to all of us. We are all familiar with the rhymes we used when playing games and those we used to tease and taunt our "enemies." Hand-clapping rhymes require the use of clapping in a special pattern and sometimes involves snapping fingers and slapping thighs as well. Ball-bouncing rhymes often required that tricks and stunts be done in between bounces. Other rhymes were used just to take away the boredom of a long walk to town or to a friend's house. Sad to say, rhymes are often used

to make fun of and taunt others. Rhymes have often been turned into songs, such as "London Bridge Is Falling Down" and "The Muffin Man." Oftentimes hand actions were developed to go along with the songs, turning them into an off-Broadway production.

Use rhymes in your classroom to help children stretch after a lesson or as accompaniments to recess time. Be warned -- once you teach children a few rhymes, they will come back for more -- and they will more than likely choose one rhyme that they will want to repeat over and over and over again.

You can find rhymes in several places, but here are a few good resources that contain collections of them:

**PLAY RHYMES by Marc Brown (Puffin, 1987)**
"I'm a Little Teapot"
"Wheels on the Bus"
"Bears, Bears, Everywhere"
"The Counting Game"

**PARTY RHYMES by Marc Brown (Puffin, 1988)**
"London Bridge Is Falling Down"
"Pawpaw Patch"
"Skip to My Lou"
"The Muffin Man"
"She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain"
"The Farmer in the Dell"
"Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush"

**ANNA BANANA: 101 JUMP-ROPE RHYMES by Joanna Cole (Scholastic, 1989)**
"How Many?"
"Straight Jumping"
"Now's the Time to MISS"
"Actions"

**MISS MARY MACK AND OTHER CHILDREN'S STREET RHYMES by Joanna Cole & Stephanie Calmenson (William Morrow, 1990)**
"Hand-Clapping Rhymes"
"Ball-Bouncing Rhymes"

"Teases and Comebacks"

Because children watch so much TV they will also bring to school rhymes and songs learned there. Recent additions include
songs and rhymes learned while watching Sesame Street and Barney the Purple Dinosaur. Many of these songs and rhymes are
intended to help build self-esteem and should not necessarily be left out. The idea is to add to children's repositories so that
rhymes and songs learned from watching television are not their own choices.

**RIDDLE ME THIS, RIDDLE ME THAT**

Riddles pose the question, "What am I?" They are often short and incredibly evasive. They describe something by walking all around it without telling exactly what the"thing" is. Riddles provide clues to the answer and expect students to solve them. Some riddles are done as rhyming pairs, while others do not rhyme at all.

Gather students in the reading corner and ask them to listen closely. Then read a riddle to them, such as the following by Mary Austin:
I never speak a word,
But when my voice is heard
Even the mountains shake,
No hands I have
And yet great rocks I break.
(Thunder and Lightning)

Give students a few minutes to think about what this could be and then ask for their input. What do they think this is? How do they know that? Tell them what the author's answer is. Do they agree? Why or why not?

Ask students to work in small groups and come up with their own riddles. The riddles are told to group members to see if they can solve them. Students then choose one riddle in the group that they believe to be the hardest to solve to tell to the whole class.

For older students, read the poem "The Riddling Knight" (Anonymous), stopping after the last riddle. Divide students into small groups and ask each group to solve one of the riddles. Have each group report on their solution. Then read the rest of the poem to see if their predictions matched the solutions in the poem.

## A SAMPLING OF SILVERSTEIN

Shel Silverstein is another favorite writer and illustrator of poetry for children. His poems and drawings are enjoyed by people of all ages. Some of his collections of poetry include:

- The Giving Tree
- A Light in the Attic
- Where the Sidewalk Ends
- Falling Up
- The Missing Piece
- The Missing Piece Meets the Big O
- A Giraffe and a Half
- Lafcadio, the Lion Who Shot Back

Some of my personal favorites from Silverstein's collections are:

**WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS**
"Invitation"
"Captain Hook"
"Hug O'War"
"Colors"
"The Loser"
"Listen to the Mustn'ts"
"Smart"
"Boa Constrictor"
"For Sale"
"Sick"
"Who"
"Where the Sidewalk Ends"

"The Crocodile's Toothache"
"What's in the Sack"
"Ma and God"
"Paul Bunyan"
"If the World Was Crazy"
"Afraid of the Dark"

**A LIGHT IN THE ATTIC**
"Prayer of the Selfish Child"
"Picture Puzzle Piece"
"Monsters I've Met"
"Memorizin' Mo"
"Reflection"
"Messy Room"
"The Pirate"
"The Homework Machine"
"Whatif"
"Rockabye"
"One Two"
"Bored"
"Standing Is Stupid"
"Nobody"
"Arrows"
"Play Ball"
"Kidnapped!"

**FALLING UP**
"My Robot"
"The Deadly Eye"
"The Voice"
"Screamin' Millie"
"Medusa"
"Haunted"
"A Battle in the Sky"
"Dancin' in the Rain"
"Description"
"Obedient"
"Lyin' Larry"
"Tell Me"
"Camp Wonderful"

"The Nap Taker"
"No"
"Dentist Dan"
"Headphone Harold"
"Crazy Dream"

Like Prelutsky, Silverstein's poems are often preposterous and highly imaginative. They reflect a child's viewpoint of the world around her. Many of his poems tell children that they can be whatever they wish to be and are statements about the possibilities of children from all cultures.

**SAVE THE PLANET**

While studying the environment and the need to recycle, share some poems from Pat Moon's Earth Lines: Poems for the Green Age. "This is the Earth" is based on the nursery rhyme "The House That Jack Built."

Other selections from Pat Moon that will help students think about how we are treating our planet, ourselves and others include:

"Seeds"
"Today's Tomorrow"
"Antarctic Kingdom"
"Dying Quietly"
"Prophecy"
"My Pal Al"
"Litterology"
"A Cautionary Tale"
"Eating Disorder"
"Charlie"

Many of these poems deal not only with how the world has mis-managed its natural resources, but also with human issues such as poverty, hunger, and mis-treatment of others, including animals.

Gather students together and talk about the things they can do to save the earth and its inhabitants. Ask someone to be a recorder and write the responses on chart paper. Work together to boil ideas down to central

themes, then ask students to get together in small groups and a choral poem to be shared with the entire class, other classrooms, administrators, parents, etc. Students may want to save the reading of their poems for Earth Day.

## SCHOOL DAYS

Poems about school, homework, report cards, writing, reading, etc. are plentiful. Students enjoy hearing poems about school because they can truly relate to the topic. Some of the offerings are funny and some are not; some rhyme, some do not.

**POEM HIGHLIGHT**:

**September**
by Lucille Clifton
(from Everett Anderson's Year)
(Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1974)

I already know where Africa is
and I already know how to
count to ten and
I went to school every day last year,
why do I have to go again?

**Ode to Spelling**
by Roger Herman
(Asheville-Citizen Times, August 1992)

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my PC;
It plainly marks four my revue,
Mistakes I might not sea.

I've run this poem threw wit,
I'm sure your pleas to no
Its letter perfect, in it's weigh --
My checker tolled me sew.

As a break from the rigor of the classroom curriculum, place several "school" poems on each table in the classroom. You should have enough poems so that every student may select one and enough to provide a variety from which to choose.

Ask students to visit the tables and choose one of the poems. Students should sit down at the table from which they selected their poem. After students have been given some time (10-15 minutes approximately) to select their poems, ask students to share the poems with the group at their table and choose one poem to share with the entire class. They may have one person read the poem, create a choral reading of the poem, or create a quick skit for the poem. Other presentation methods should be negotiable but not outlandish. Presentations should take 2-3 minutes each (or long enough to read the poem through one time).

Gather students together in the reading corner and ask each group to present their poem. After each group has presented, talk with students about which poems they liked the most and why, how relevant this poetry is to their lives, etc.

**SEEING THE WIND**

As a science connection, read poems about the seasons and weather, such as "Who Has Seen the Wind?" by Christina Rossetti and "I Do Not Like the Sunshine!" by Jack Prelutsky.

Other suggestions are "Rain Song" by Langston Hughes, "Spring" by William Blake, "Spring Grass" by Carl Sandburg, "The Wind" by Kay Starbird, "Change" by Charlotte Zolotow, "Frosted-Window World" by Aileen Fisher, "September" by Lucille Clifton, and "Fog" by Carl Sandburg.

Add a couple of riddles, such as the one about thunder and lightning by Mary Austin and that about the wind by J. R. R. Tolkien. Include some poems about the things that happen during given seasons, such as "Velvet

Shoes" by Elinor Wylie, "Sunning" by James S. Tippett, "Flute Song" by Joseph Bruchac, "The Voice That Beautifies the Land" by Nancy Wood, and "Seasons" by the Kormans.

Sometimes it is enough just to hear poetry read out loud. It isn't always necessary to dissect it. Teachers may wish to talk with students about their connections to the poem, such as things they remembered as they listened or feelings generated by the poems. Teachers may choose to wait until the next day to talk about the poems. For every poem a teacher reads, another connection awaits in the wings.

Another choice may be to talk with students about such thinking such as how one could see the wind as well as hear it, how one could taste the rain, how clouds could be touched and why different clouds not only make different weather but also make us feel differently, etc. Some of this thinking could lead to exciting writing choices for the students.

## SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER CLASSICS

Much of today's literature borrows from the classics in one way or another. It is imperative that children have a knowledge of the classics (and folklore) so that they may make important connections in their own world.

While elementary school children may not totally grasp the entirety of Shakespeare's work, it is possible to introduce them to his works by reading selections from them. Many children have probably seen movies based on Shakespeare's work, such as Macbeth, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer's Night Dream, and others. Some of the concepts expressed in these works have found expression in today's world; e. g. phrases such as "a rose by any other name" and "a pound of flesh."

Other authors, such as Homer, have written works with which children can identify because they have recently become television heroes. A prime example of this is the popularity of "Robin Hood" and "Hercules." Reading selections from "The Iliad" or "The Odyssey" will help children become familiar with Homer's works without making them seem forced. Again, phrases from Homer's works remain with us today and are necessary to students' cultural literacy. An example is the phrase "caught between Scylla

and Charybdis," or "caught between a rock and a hard place." Children will especially appreciate Odysseus' adventures with Scylla and Charybdis and the Cyclops.

Many books of the Bible are poetry. One of the best "love poems" around is the "Song of Solomon." Much of the Psalms written by David bring brilliant images to mind as they are read. Although teachers do not want to promote Christianity as a religion, the poetry in the Bible should be offered as a reading/response choice.

Poets such as Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Cervantes, Keats, Yeats, Byron, Poe, Longfellow, Browning, and others should also be read aloud. Many of these poets had to fight for the right to create their poetry as they did. If teachers begin in the elementary grades to familiarize students with the work of such poets, the students' experiences in the latter part of their education will be much more fruitful and enjoyable. Reading these poets aloud will also help children to become familiar with the patterns of language from other ages and other languages.

Many of the works of classic poets may be found in anthologies, some of which are listed below: Mack, M. (Ed.). (1985). The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces: Volume 1 - Literature of Western Culture Through the Renaissance. (5th Ed.). NY: W. W. Norton & Company. [ISBN: 0-393-95432-3]

Mack, M. (Ed.). (1985). The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces: Volume 2 - Literature of Western Culture Since the Renaissance. (5th Ed.). NY: W. W. Norton & Company. [ISBN: 0-393-95434-X]

McMichael, G. (Ed.). (1974). Anthology of American Literature: Volume I - Colonial Through Romantic. (4th Ed.). NY: Macmillan Publishing Company. [ISBN: 0-02-379621-9]

McMichael, G. (Ed.). (1974). Anthology of American Literature: Volume II - Realism to the Present. (4th Ed.). NY: Macmillan Publishing Company. [ISBN: 0-02-379622-7]

McQuade, D. (Ed.). (1987). The Harper American Literature: Volume I. NY: Harper & Row. [ISBN: 0-06-044367-7]

McQuade, D. (Ed.). (1987). The Harper American Literature: Volume II. NY: Harper & Row. [ISBN: 0-06-044368-5]

Perkins, G. (Ed.). (1985). The American Tradition in Literature: Volume I. (6th Ed.). NY: Random House. [ISBN: 0-394-33628-3]

Perkins, G. (Ed.). (1985). The American Tradition in Literature: Volume II. (6th Ed.) NY: Random House. [ISBN: 0-394-34072-8]

## SPELLING & POETRY

Sally Cox, in the March 1998 issue of Instructor Magazine, suggests that teachers link spelling to poetry instead of requiring them to memorize isolated spelling words.

Sally chooses a poem that relates to a theme the class is studying, calling it the "Poem of the Week." She then underlines the words she wants to use and makes two photocopies. In this way students not only learn new words but also have a chance to connect them to content areas as well. One copy goes home for students to use in review and to share with parents.

The other copy is used in class and is illustrated by the each child. Poems from each week are collected in the child's spelling folder. At the end of the year, the poems are bound into illustrated anthologies and taken home by the students.

## SPORTS ILLUSTRATED POEMS

In each classroom there are several athletes -- some like to swim, some like to run, some like to play football or baseball or soccer or basketball, some like to ski, some like to go fishing and some just like to walk. Many dream of the day when they will become a star short stop or the best field goal kicker in the league. It is important to include sports in thcurriculum so that students begin to understand that sports connects to language arts and history as much as it connects to health and the human
body.

*Casey At the Bat* by Ernest L. Thayer and Patricia A. Polacco (G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1989), is a narrative poem about the celebrated baseball player who strikes out in a crucial game.

*Hummers, Knucklers, and Slow Curves: Contemporary Baseball Poems* edited by Don Johnson (University of Illinois Press, 1991) is a collection of poems about baseball. A warning here -- some of the language may be offensive to students and parents. Be sure to preview the poem before reading it aloud.

Donald Graves adds some poems about sports and physical education in his book *Baseball, Snakes, and Summer Squash: Poems About Growing Up* (Boyds Mill Press, 1996).

Collections of poems by Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky (as well as others) contain within them poems about being chosen last in gym class and playing ball in the summer sun. There are even poems for those who do not especially enjoy sports.

Read poems about various sports to students as an interesting side note to studying health and the human body. In whole class discussions talk with students about the benefits of exercise and the opportunity sports give them to learn about competition and keeping themselves fit for life.

This would be an excellent time to talk about other things that many athletes must face -- such as drug use (steroids, alcohol, other prescription drugs, cocaine), injuries, contracts, money management, etc. Other questions that could be used are: What are any one person's chances of becoming a major league player? What kind of salary could one expect? Is the salary worth the danger of injury? What would it like to be on the road all the time and away from your family? Do we expect too much of our sports heroes? What is the one all American sport and why do you think that? Questions such as these will help students make connections of things learned in the classroom to their daily lives and their futures.

As an after note, ask students to respond in their reading journals to a prompt such as: 1) How do sports improve the sense of community in a school? 2) Should sports be touted over academics in a school? Why/Why not? 3) What happens when our sports heroes fail us? etc. This will give students a chance

to respond to their own feelings about sports and also an opportunity to work with prompts that may be part of end-of-grade testing.

**TASTY POEMS**

Gather students in the reading corner, asking them to sit back, relax, and imagine along with you. Then read "A Pizza the Size of the Sun" by Jack Prelutsky from the book of the same name. Watch to see how many students start craving pizza and then talk to them about the power of suggestion.

Place various foods on tables and ask students to taste them, then read the poems placed on the table with the foods. Ask them to take notes in their writer's notebooks as to whether the poem matched the taste of the food at the table. Which foods were preferred over others? Why? Which foods do they think they could write poems or riddles about?

Some suggestions for foods and poems include:

- strawberries - "Millions of Strawberries" by Genevieve Taggard
- creme of wheat - "Little Miss Muffet" a Mother Goose rhyme
- chocolate "Chocolate" - by Arnold Adoff
- scrambled eggs "Sunny Side Up" - by Arnold Adoff

Poems to read for fun are plentiful in the "food groups," many of them having to do with the funny things that happen when the wrong people try to cook. Poems to read and just enjoy include:

- "Mummy Slept Late and Daddy Fixed Breakfast" John Ciardi
- "The Turkey Shot Out of the Oven" Jack Prelutsky
- "My Mother Made a Meatloaf" Jack Prelutsky
-

**WHO AM I**

Bio-poems are a way to help students think about themselves and begin to appreciate their abilities and those of others. Before beginning this project, read poetry that exhibits a variety of views of the world such as

- "If I Were in Charge of the World" by Judith Viorst,
- "When I Am Full of Silence" by Jack Prelutsky,
- "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks and
- "Our Children" by Nancy Walker.

Have students use their writing notebooks to do a little thinking about who they are, what they want to be, what is important to them, who is important to them, etc. What are their dreams and hopes? What do they fear? etc.

From here, give students the pattern for the bio-poem. The original creator is unknown but this version was provided by Barbara Bell, Director of the Reading Center at Western Carolina University.

LINE 1: Your first name only
LINE 2: Four traits that describe you
LINE 3: Sibling of (brother/sister of, son/daughter of, friend of, etc.)
LINE 4: Lover of (3 people or ideas)
LINE 5: Who feel (3 things)
LINE 6: Who needs (3 things)
LINE 7: Who gives (3 things)
LINE 8: Who fears (3 things)
LINE 9: Who would like to see (3 things)
LINE 10: Resident of (street, city, state, country, etc.)
LINE 11: Your last name only

As an example so that students can jump-start their thinking, do your own bio-poem and share it and use the following as an example.

**Sam**
**Honest, happy, content and fun**
**Brother of Larry, Jim and Connie**
**Lover of baseball, super computer games and summer**
**Who feels joy at Christmas, loneliness in the dark and happiness with friends**

**Who needs lots of sunshine, good books and some privacy**
**Who gives good advice, funny jokes and lasting friendship**
**Who fears wars, hunger and the end of a good book**
**Who would like to see wars ended, people smiling and more summer vacation**
**Resident of Crazy Lane, Ohmygosh, Kansas, USA**
**Jones**

When bio-poems are completed, have students share them with each other in a whole class group. Talk about they are alike and how they are different. Then have them copy and illustrate their bio-poems and mount them on a classroom bulletin board or wall as testimony to the diversity of the classroom community.

This web site and others created and maintained by Merry Broughton: The Library Dragon, Page Keeper. Program Assistant IV in the Reading Center at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina.